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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [GM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: HOFF GUARDED ABOUT GERMAN ENGAGEMENT IN IRAQ AND
AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C/NF) SUMMARY. During a March 25-28 visit to Baghdad marred by indirect fire (IDF), German Bundestag member Elke Hoff, accompanied by Hans Christian Roessler from Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Dieter Bednarz from the weekly Der Spiegel and Nazyr Bircholtz of the German Iraq Friendship Society met with GOI and Embassy and MNF-I leadership. With MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker, Hoff was guarded about additional German engagement in Afghanistan and Iraq, but appeared to welcome the opportunity to burnish her credentials as the Bundestag's Middle-Eastern hotspot trailblazer. END SUMMARY.

INDIRECT FIRE PROMPTS CHANGE OF PLAN

12. (C/NF) Ms. Hoff's visit began as planned on Tuesday, March 25 with a 15:00 call on the Deputy Speaker of the Iraqi Council of Representatives Sheik Khalid al-Attiya. Heavy rocket fire later in the afternoon prompted RSO to cancel International Zone movements and to invite the delegation to stay in the Palace's hardened DV quarters. The Mission relayed the invitation via the German Charge Andreas Krueger who at the time was with Ms. Hoff at the Rashid Hotel. Hoff eagerly accepted but Krueger told PolOff that she would not be available at Krueger's cellphone number for much longer because the German PSD (Personal Security Detail) was getting nervous and planned to leave shortly. The Embassy PSD leader reported that when she arrived at the Rashid to collect the delegation the Germans had already departed, leaving the delegation alone at the hotel. Continued IDF fire curtailed Wednesday's schedule after Hoff's second meeting and the Embassy, with Ms. Hoff's approval, decided it would be better for the delegation to depart on Thursday at the conclusion of the Embassy/MNF-I meetings, rather than Friday morning as originally scheduled. To its credit, the German Embassy assisted in changing the group's tickets.

HOFF GUARDED ABOUT GERMAN MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

13. (C/NF) MNF-I Commanding General Petraeus gave Hoff an overview of operations in Basrah, which he said the GOI would not have had the capacity to launch even six months previously, and welcomed her visit as a sign of greater German interest in Iraq. He stressed there were numerous fields, such as education, in which Germany could become more involved in Iraq. Hoff provided the CG a downbeat assessment about German engagement in Afghanistan, characterized the problems there as "excruciatingly difficult" and suggested support for a complete troop withdrawal was gaining momentum with the German public in the run-up to 2009 elections. She was equally pessimistic about Pakistan -- in her estimation the key country in the war on terror -- where, during her

trip there (which she also claimed was the first by a German parliamentarian) she noted "very, very deep anti-U.S. feeling." She closed by inviting the General Petraeus to Germany to provide an update on the situation in Iraq on behalf of the Mars/Minerva Society, which she described as an association of German MOD, Bundestag and other officials.

IRAQ PART OF LARGER REGIONAL PUZZLE

¶4. (C/NF) In a meeting later that morning, the Ambassador echoed General Petraeus' comments by stressing that Basrah fighting -- GOI-owned and strongly supported by the local populace weary of criminals running the city -- had been inevitable even if some questions remained about the GOI's timing. Events in Iraq, he assessed, were part of a much larger regional puzzle and Ms. Hoff's trip would give her the opportunity to see linkages that were not always apparent from the perch of a European capital. Hoff agreed and mentioned that her GOI meetings and previous travel to Pakistan and Afghanistan had made it clear there was no substitute for first-hand experience.

¶5. (C/NF) Hoff thinks Germany should focus on the way ahead for both Iraq and the region. She volunteered that she and the Iranian Ambassador to Germany discussed mediation between the U.S. and Iran on nuclear issues. They agreed that perhaps a "prominent personality" could serve as mediator and added Germany might have several candidates for the job. Hoff suggested the U.S. would have to drop its demand that Iran renounce development of nuclear weapons before negotiations could begin, a move Ambassador Crocker rejected reasoning that such a step would signal U.S. acquiescence to Iran's brinkmanship. Hoff agreed with Ambassador Crocker that if the Iraq experiment failed it would be a problem for all countries, not just the U.S. and that this was adequate

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justification for increased German engagement here. Ambassador Crocker suggested that Germany should 1) encourage Iraq's neighbors to be more positively engaged in Iraq, 2) follow up its own useful support with a more visible role here, and 3) increase engagement in Iraq with the Iraqi Council of Representatives. Hoff bemoaned the fact that Germans had "lost their pioneer spirit" and "had gotten comfortable and wrapped around their own little problems." She acknowledged that Germany had historically strong ties with the region, but cited Chancellor Merkel's recent visit to only Saudi Arabia as proof of German neglect. Hoff promised to return to Iraq and hoped she would be able to bring a larger delegation of Bundestag and German press members, but was candid about the strong opposition her visit aroused at the German MFA.

¶6. (C/NF) COMMENT. Hoff came across as focused on burnishing (and touting) her credentials as the Bundestag's Middle Eastern hot-spot trailblazer, and several observers in her meeting with Ambassador Crocker thought she was making a pitch for the mediator position she had discussed with the Iranian Ambassador in Berlin. Overall she was guarded about additional German engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan. Baghdad looks forward to Embassy Berlin's follow-up and assessment of the deliverables Hoff's visit produces. END COMMENT.
CROCKER